

Story #38 (Tape 11)  
1961-1962

Narrator: Ahmet Uyar  
Location: Village of Zir, 30 Km.  
south of Ankara, about 1000 people  
Date: January 1962

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#38  
hoca -- ignorant

#38 Son -- clever #38 Ağa -- son of

The Ignorant Hoca and the Clever Son of the Ağa

Once upon a time an ignorant but well-dressed hoca came to a village during Ramazan and was put up at the house of the ağa. He had come for cer.<sup>1</sup> There were many such members of the religious profession who wore big turbans and expensive gowns but lacked proper religious training and lived off the poor village people like parasites. As you know, such an existence is anti-Moslem, but unfortunately there were many such hocas who gave themselves over to this practice.

The ağa in this village had a son who had some education and whose knowledge of theological matters was very good, and when it was time to break the fast, the son joined the ağa and the hoca to eat. The ağa had spread out many delicacies. The unworthy hoca ate a great many of these, and he consumed a great amount of the sweetmeats. The ağa tried to suggest tactfully that the hoca should fill up on something besides sweets, and so he said, "Hoca Effendi, according to what I have heard, the olive is a sacred food,<sup>2</sup> one that was created after the Flood, good both for people and for the country. Why don't you relish the olive?"

fast -- brushing  
of

Flood (Biblical)

<sup>1</sup> During the month of Ramazan the medreses (the Ottoman theological colleges) closed, and the students and teachers traveled through the land, living as guests wherever they went. Only qualified students and teachers were supposed to do this, but many others seized the opportunity to exploit the villagers for what they could. They acted much like the less scrupulous friars of the Middle Ages in the West. They were said to go for cer, a living off the countryside. As many as 50,000 started each year from Istanbul alone. Cer comes from cermek, to draw or pull.

<sup>2</sup> Some people in Turkey believe that the Lord had not created the olive until the dove brought the olive branch to Noah. Each evening during Ramazan the long day's fasting is broken by first eating some food that is considered sacred. Usually it is olives or salt.

cer -- [money extracted from country people  
by wandering religious men  
preology students]

The hoca answered, "Yes, the olive is a sacred food, indeed, created after the Flood, and it was revealed to us by God in the Elemtere Sure [a chapter in the Koran]."

The ağa's son knew that the passage the hoca referred to was not in the Elemtere Sure at all but in the Zeytuni Sure, and then he knew that under the big turban was an empty head. Being a well-bred son, he got up after the meal and, taking a pitcher, poured water on the hoca's hands, as is customary. [Whoever pours water on another's hands after the meal is showing him respect; often this chore is done by a servant.] The young man said, "Hoca Effendi, may I have your name?"

"Well, the first letter of my name is M."

"Ah," said the boy, "then you must be Merkep." [Merkep is the polite word for donkey; eşek is the more common word used by peasants.]

"How intelligent you are!" said the hoca sarcastically. "For what reason do you think that a word beginning with an M must be Merkep?"

"For the same reason that you think there is some relationship between the alive and the Elemtere Sure, which is about Abraham and his temple."